

Anti-gravity Treadmill Offers Sunny View Residents Unique Rehab Experience

When Sunny View resident Tussy Bangert began experiencing back and leg pain, it was so intense she was confined to a wheelchair. When she sought treatment from the rehabilitation team at the Sunny View Care Center, their shared goal was to eliminate the pain and get her back on her feet as quickly as possible.

"That was easier said than done," said Teri Gil, rehabilitation director for Select Therapies which serves as Sunny View's rehabilitation partner. "Walking was definitely a challenge for her because of the pain."



However, thanks to a state of the art treadmill developed by NASA, Tussy has made great progress and only needs the wheelchair on a part-time basis and is walking longer distances each day.

The Alter-G anti-gravity treadmill is different from other fitness and therapeutic equipment because it defies gravity by applying a lifting force to the body that reduces weight on the lower extremities. Unlike other unweighting methods, the Alter-G enables athletes to train with their natural gait and rhythm, and significantly shortens the time required for patients, particularly older adults, to recover from injury or surgery.

Users begin by stepping into a plastic "bubble" which zips to encase their entire lower half. "OK, fold your arms across your chest," a tech instructs Tussy. "Keep your heels planted, and don't let it lift you up off the ground."

Tussy did as instructed. Once she started her walk, she discovered the uniqueness of this particular treadmill: in addition to setting the speed, she could set the weight on a scale from 100 percent down to 20. The machine offers various levels of weight bearing so that users can walk, jog or run with less pressure on their joints.

"It's like walking under water or walking on the moon," Tussy said smiling. "It's very easy to use and the fun is seeing your feet move and having no pain."

Sunny View Care Center is only a handful of rehabilitation centers and medical facilities in the Bay Area which has a Alter-G on site. But in the few months of use, it is paying off with increased resident health.

"Sunny View and Select Therapies are very excited about our new addition," Teri said. "The treadmill is rapidly becoming an indispensable device for rehabilitation and conditioning."

Teri points to various benefits of using the Alter-G for older adults such as the possible postponement of bone loss, diabetes and heart issues. It can also reduce arthritis pain, anxiety and depression.

"It could or may also prevent functional decline which allows the possibility for residents to have greater independence in essential activities of daily living such as walking, bathing, dressing or getting up from a chair," Teri said.

According to its designers, the Alter-G is applicable for medical uses in rehabilitation after lower extremity injury or surgery, aerobic conditioning, weight control, gait training for neurological conditions, and strengthening and conditioning for older patients.

"The best part about the technology is that the user is free to walk, jog, or run with a full-range of motion in both the upper and lower body," Teri said. "And the design of the enclosure is such that the user feels very little of the force needed to hold their weight."

Studies on the machine's effectiveness are still ongoing, but the early results look promising, experts said.